

Rev It Up

Value and Accessibility Fuel Growth for Red Truck Portfolio

BY ALIA AKKAM

If Fred and Nancy Cline of Cline Cellars hadn't been in attendance at an auction for the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, they might never have laid eyes on Dennis Zieminski's striking painting of a classic red Dodge truck set amid a calming, pastoral background. It was the sight of this old automobile that inspired the duo to launch Red Truck Wines in 2002.

"The Red Truck portfolio doesn't necessarily cater to an old or young demographic exclusively," points out Doug Walker, manager, 585 Wines. "Red Truck strikes a chord in terms of Americana, evoking images of life on the farm. It's not a critter brand that was made up; it actually tells a story."

Beyond a Blue Sky

While the vintage truck set against a peaceful landscape of rolling hills certainly appeals, winemaker Charlie Tsegeletos crafts consistently good wines that are accessible to consumers.

"We've repositioned our pricing on Red Truck to provide strategic value to our customers," explains Joey Franzia,



▲
The Red Truck Portfolio

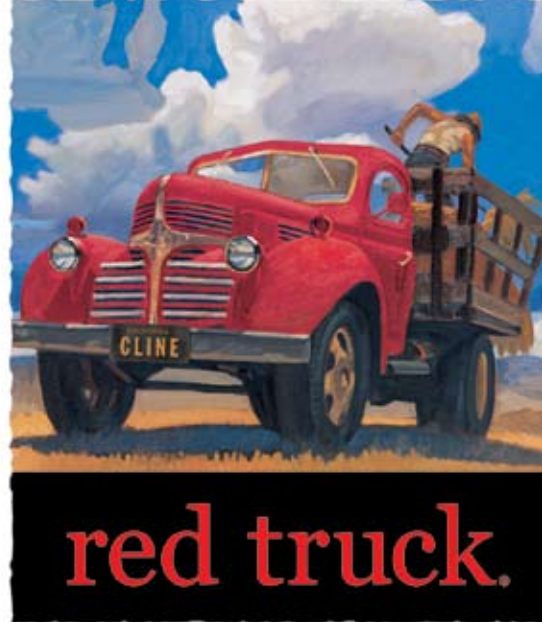
general sales manager, 585 Wines. "One thing Bronco Wine Co., which took control of 585 Wines Partners in early 2010, does well is offer efficiency of vineyard ownership; we manage all facets of wine production from the vineyard to the table, and provide high quality at a great price."

Red Truck's signature blend (SRP: \$10.99), an easy-to-drink, fruit forward wine, features a combination of Syrah, Petite Syrah—which offers a nice tannic backbone—Cabernet Franc and a touch of Mourvedre and Grenache. "Our grapes come from the same consistent growers as well," notes Walker. "Even though the brand has grown, Charlie has maintained a certain style with his wines."

In addition to the Red Truck blend, single varietal releases (SRP: \$11.99) include a Central Coast Cabernet Sauvignon, California Pinot Noir and Sonoma County Zinfandel. Just in time for the holidays, Little Trucks (SRP: \$11.99), 187ml four-packs of Red Truck, are the ideal stocking stuffer and respond to the growing trend of consumers seeking out alternative wine packaging options.

An Accelerating Truck

"When we started it was literally just the red blend," says Walker, who points to the brand's growth with equally successful line extensions like White Truck (SRP: \$9.99-\$11.99) un-oaked Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Grigio; Pink Truck (SRP: \$8.99),



a summer blend of Zinfandel, Grenache, and Mourvedre; and the all-organic Green Truck (SRP: \$13.99), a collection of Petite Sirah, Sauvignon Blanc, Zinfandel, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, Walker comments, "Green Truck is very exciting, but it's going to take some time for the segment to grow. It has to be a bottle of wine that's good first, organic second." So far the brand has made waves partnering with Whole Foods.

Primarily the wines under the Red Truck umbrella are recognized in the off-premise, but Franzia is quick to point out that they are also becoming more well known in the on-premise, appearing on wine lists at casual chains such as Texas Roadhouse and California Pizza Kitchen, as well as those at Kimpton Hotel restaurants like Silverleaf Tavern in New York City.

Walker says the spectrum of Red Truck Wines is well positioned right now, but it doesn't mean there aren't future packaging opportunities down the line.

"It's pretty extensive right now," adds Franzia. "The goal is to maintain the current product portfolio, fine tune the selections and maximize consumer interest."

The advantage to retailers and bar managers, according to Walker: "Virtually everyone's heard of Red Truck; if you're a wine consumer at this price point you know about it; that's an excellent starting point." ■